Red Virgin Vol. 1

On every occasion, whatever we do, we do evil, and an intolerable evil. We must ask that all the evil we do may fall solely and directly on ourselves. That is the cross.

SIMONE WEIL

There was a monk who was fighting the good fight at Scete and the Devil put his in mind the image of a certain most beautiful woman and was seriously afflicting him. Then, another brother came down from Egypt to Scete and, as they were speaking together, he said that the wife of so-and-so had died. It was the very woman on whose account the monk was embattled. On hearing this, he went up to Egypt by night, and opened her tomb. He mopped up her bodily fluids and kept it in his cell when he came back. He would set that stench before him and do battle with his mind, saying: "Look, this is the one you were seeking; you have her, take your fill!"

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Julien Nguyen, 'Julian the Apostate', 2017.
© Julien Nguyen
Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery,
New York/ Los Angeles

Mundus Imaginalis

DANA DAWUD

i.

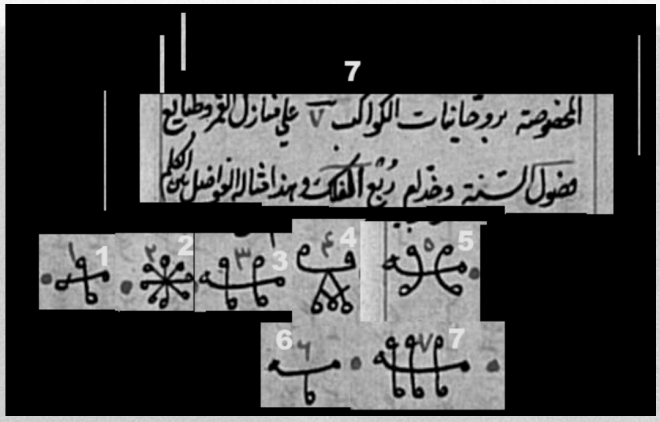
One starts out, but at some point there is a break-down of the geographical coordinates found on our maps. Only the "traveller" is not aware of it at that moment. He realizes it — either with dismay or amazement — only after the event. If he did notice it, he would be able to retrace his steps at will or indicate the way to others. However, he can only describe where he has been; he cannot show the road to anyone.

بی‌راه *bī-rāh*, A devious path, a by-road; a wanderer, who deviates, errs, or loses the way; astray; unprincipled, dissolute; a courtezan; anger; misdeeds, unbecoming acts;—*bī-rāh shudan*, To wander, stray, deviate.

ii.

The traveller is our subject here, the traveller which is oblivious to the fact they are traveling, we need to become the perpetrators of this travel, we need to cause it. We do know that our subject is the traveller, however, their identity remains anonymous and contingent to the path we create . This is the knowledge which escapes us as we begin to create paths for the traveller, to assist the traveler we must lose all memory of the traveler.. This complete oblivion is what we give into, as we agree to create a new path for the traveller to pass through. This is what is lost in time, time lost. In creating the path we create time.

This is a dangerous attempt to create the path of the traveller, who crosses time. We know that time is created because we don't know the identity of the traveller. If we try to know who the traveller is, we lose the path we are constructing. We need to construct the path while enduring the pain of this loss. By creating the path we lose access to it. If we are the traveller, then we lose our sense of self. If we are willing to create the traveller's path, then we give our sense of self up. This is time lost. In creating the path we create time.



iii.

"I have a 20 thousand line divine intellect compiler, that operates just in time and ahead of time."

"that God at one and the same time is the Hidden and the Revealed…"

There's only one way to save painting from being a dead medium:

Creating time.

"Gauguin went to Tahiti primarily to re-immerse himself in the primitive world of simple feelings. In a way, this return to the origins was a bath of innocence. Parisian critics could not comprehend that his journey was more of a displacement in time than in space."

White is God's symbol, gold and yellow signifies the Word or the revelation and red and blue sanctification or the Holy Spirit.

"Aguéli thinks that art gives a better understanding of "immobile time" or of the "permanent presence of the extra-temporal and timeless self " (actualité permanente du moi extra-temporel et immarcescible). This time leads to the understanding of the fourth dimension and of its esoteric character."

"pure art, according to Gnosis, wants to link the concrete to the abstract, the quantity to the quality, space to time, through the extreme limit of the matter, that is numbers."

iv.

"I saw birds dwelling in the air. They were eating their daily bread and dying in the air. Then I passed that place and saw a sea that was floating in the air. Its name was Fate (qaziya)."[1]

The phenomenon of dead birds falling from the sky... What ?is its relationship to Corona

Saturday 11/April 2020 - 04:31 PM

dead birds fall from

سقوط طيور ميتة من السماء

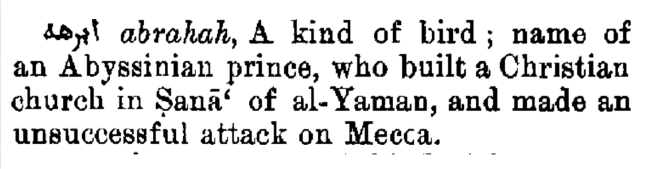
The birds are dying because of the sea collapsing itself onto the sky, causing the birds to surrender to fate and eat bread that is poisoned by the polluted seawater.

A ابابيل *abābīl*, A kind of bird, an owl, bustard, swallow ;—*abābīli siyāh*, Swifts.

[1] Christiane Gruber (trans.), *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension: A Persian-Sunni Devotional Tale*, (London: I.B. Tauris 2010)

The militarization of birds in Islamic literature is rooted in their position between the earthly sky and the sea, where the sky is the plane of celestial orders and the sea is the plane of fate.

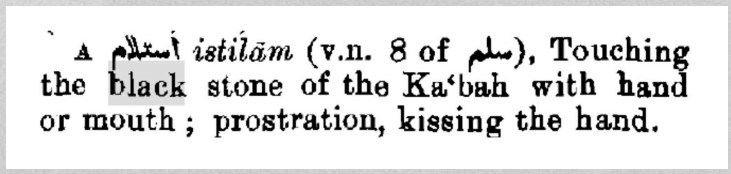
What happens when the birds which should be obeying heavens' orders of violence start dying mid-air?


ابرهه *abrahah*, A kind of bird; name of an Abyssinian prince, who built a Christian church in Ṣanā' of al-Yaman, and made an unsuccessful attack on Mecca.

Abrahah shares the name of a bird, and built a church; when birds die their sounds become church bells. Abraha is a militarized bird, the orders coming from another heaven, a dying heaven.

v.

"Baetylus (also Baetyl, Bethel, or Betyl, from Semitic bet el "house of God") are sacred stones that were supposedly endowed with life. According to ancient sources, these objects of worship were meteorites, which were dedicated to the gods"


A استلام *istilām* (v.n. 8 of سلم), Touching the black stone of the Ka'bah with hand or mouth; prostration, kissing the hand.

I found out that every black stone needs a sun.

To create the sun you need to taste the stone.

A اِسْتِلْذَاذ *istilẓāẓ* (v.n. 10 of لذ), Tasting, relishing.

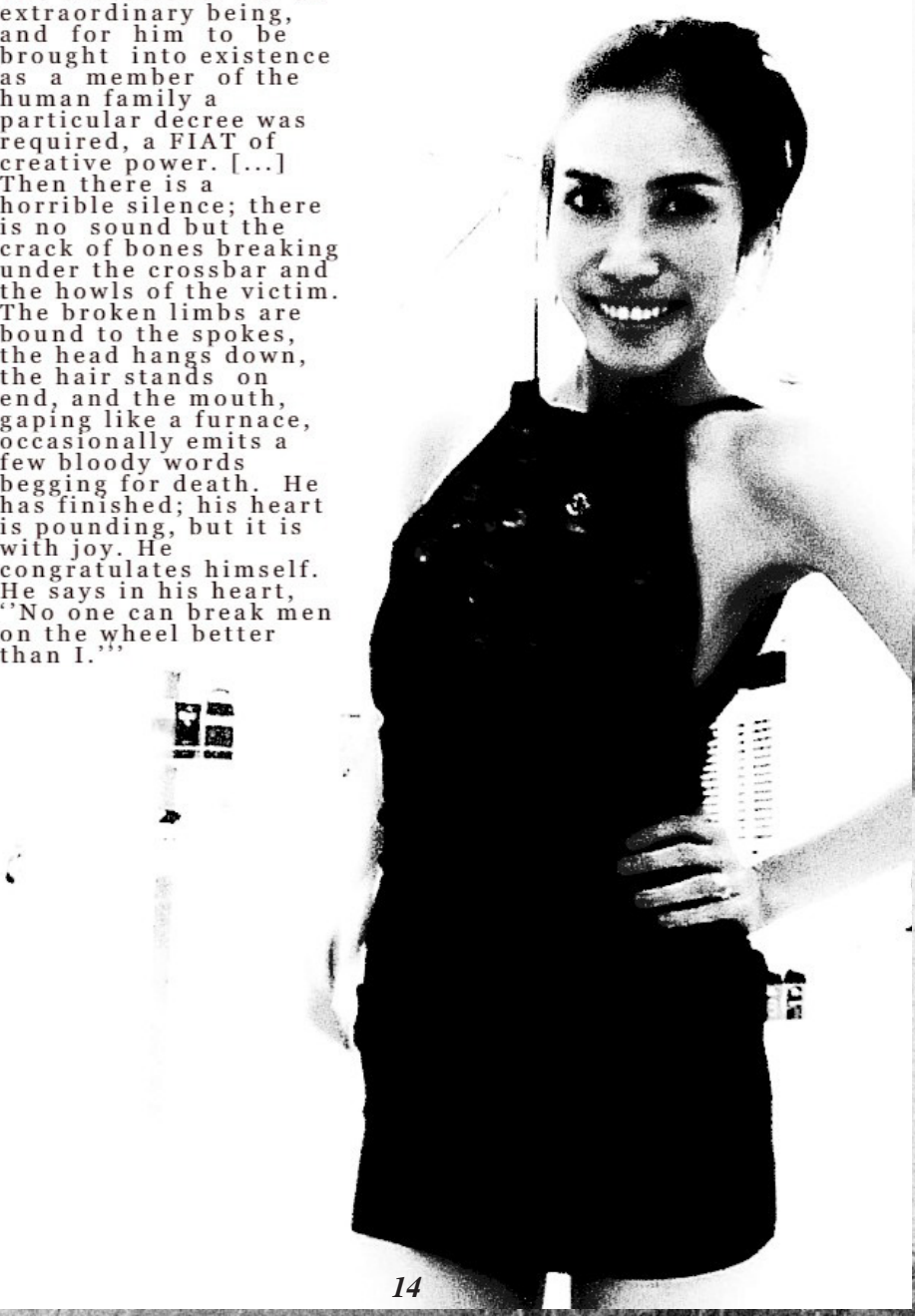
"If I call you will you pick up? if you pick up are you going to say something? can you pick up and stay silent? can you go somewhere dark, and find something black and hold it as you pick up and stay silent? can you grab the black stone and kiss it?"

"I found a black stone."

"In the sky."

"I found the house of God, in my garments."

The executioner is an extraordinary being, and for him to be brought into existence as a member of the human family a particular decree was required, a FIAT of creative power. [...] Then there is a horrible silence; there is no sound but the crack of bones breaking under the crossbar and the howls of the victim. The broken limbs are bound to the spokes, the head hangs down, the hair stands on end, and the mouth, gaping like a furnace, occasionally emits a few bloody words begging for death. He has finished; his heart is pounding, but it is with joy. He congratulates himself. He says in his heart, ''No one can break men on the wheel better than I.'''



Baby Bear

NERISSA LANE WLADICH

BABY BEAR would not eat his carrots, onions or peas.

No matter what Mama Bear did Baby Bear would not eat his carrots, onions, or peas.

She would hide his carrots under large piles of yummy rice, but he'd find them and
"Yuck!"

She would threaten Baby Bear with no dessert if he didn't have his onions, but he'd just say, "I'd rather not anyways!"

One day she tried liquidating the peas and mixing them into the broth but Baby Bear smelled them from a mile away and stood there hollering, "No peas! No peas! No peas!"

Mama Bear felt so hopeless. All the other mama bear's babies were getting big and strong and Baby Bear hadn't grown not even one inch since last December!

After Mama Bear dropped Baby Bear off at school she started crying. Large tears rolled down her face, plopping down one by one on the sidewalk. An older bear who had seen her crying crossed the street and asked her what was wrong.

"It's Baby Bear," she cried, "he just won't eat his carrots, onion, or peas! How is he going to grow big and strong like the other bears?"

"Well, have you asked him why?" the older bear replied.

Mama Bear had not asked Baby Bear why.

When Mama Bear came to pick Baby Bear up later that day she told him that they needed to talk when they got home.

"Oh no, I think I already know what you're going to say. And the answer is no! I'm not going to eat carrots, onions, or peas! No I won't!"

Mama Bear stopped the car and turned to face him. "Why?"

Baby Bear hesitated, so taken aback by his mama's simple question. Was it possible that she wasn't a brute like Daddy, with his collection of translated classics Baby closed his eyes at every time he had to pass by them? Was she not an idiot like fat Mrs. Davis, counting every day in her shrill, spinster's voice, "Ooooooooone… twooooooooo…. threeeeeeee…." ? Should he give her a chance?

"I- Mama I just can't!" he finally wailed. "The sound of the crunch of the carrots make my hairs stand on end, the way it resounds in my skull! The way you cook the onions does nothing at all to bring other flavors to the fore, they are unnecessary, and in being an excess they ruin the meal! And the color of peas is absolutely revolting, how can you expect me to keep them down?!"
Mama Bear was surprised. She had spent her entire life content in her philistine tastes, but here was her baby, suffering! So he wouldn't grow up to be big and strong but he was different, unique…Baby was sensitive.

Turning around, she put the car in drive. "Ok Baby, I understand."

Baby Bear was relieved. She understood. Her education (or lack of) and general conduct up until now (a framed Van Gogh, The Starry Night reproduction in the bathroom) betrayed the untruth of the answer. It was

more likely that she thought she understood, his very, very, simple mama. What mattered was that he would be persecuted no longer. He even felt comfortable enough to ask her for one more thing,

"Mama, can we stop using the plastic crockery you buy from Ikea? I can help you find much better sets too if you'd like!"

"I think that would actually be fun for us to do together Baby."

And one more thing, "And Mama?"

"Yes Baby?"

"I don't want you to wear your hair like that any more. It really does you no favors."

—

Baby Bear hated the way stupid people blinked.

"I hate the way stupid people blink."

He thought poverty was a disease. That's why they all had those coarse, round faces. Their eyes reflected back only a hoarder keeping accounts. It's the lepers touch, it's the untouchable's mark. Not that he knew much about India. He wondered sometimes at the marvels awaiting him at Sonagachi, whether a cheap cunt came with a giant horse's tail to flick the flies away. These fantasies were so mixed with royal decrees and chartered ships, gold and steel, plumage and incense, gruel, maggots, rot, myrrh, and sunken ships too with maybe a cook and maid caught inside, that…

Baby Bear cried every time he had to get his nails clipped. Another touch. And he cried more when thinking about how very silly it was for him to want to keep them long. Long nails were only for bears who never had to lift a finger, not for being mangled like when he had to pull the cord for the bus to stop. Mama Bear did sometimes drive him to school.

But his mama didn't even have the decency to open the car door for him…

Baby Bear did not have a hard time at school. He had many friends, girls and boys he sometimes tried sneaky things with and sometimes not. It all depended on how he felt that day, bored or not.

Baby Bear did not live in a dream. The cook and maid were quickly dismissed, "Who cares?" He had his whole life ahead of him and he was very brave. A machete through the future and wild grass and a native boy's head.

Of course Mama Bear was actually very beautiful. She never would've been Baby's mama if she wasn't. And Papa Bear was very kind and patient with Baby. His favorite days were Saturday and Sunday when they would all go the park and Papa Bear would chase him on the playground and Mama Bear would push him on the swings, they'd kick the ball to each other in a triangle, Mama Bear would go with him into the splash pad and Papa Bear would wait on the grass for them with a towel.

He always ended up forgetting about them though.

—

Baby Bear thought that when he saw Mama Bear he would tell her she smelled like ruin. He didn't even know where it came from, "You smell like ruin."

Baby Bear was walking to get boba after school. Mama Bear had given him money for lunch and Papa Bear had given him money for lunch and he hadn't cared to let either know he had extra so now he had enough to get boba after school.

Taro Milk Tea boba, Taro Milk Tea boba.

He would sit with his lips pursed up against the straw, under the umbrella on the street and watch everyone that passed by.

So Baby turned into the boba shop and came up against an unfamiliar back which at the slightest turn revealed a very familiar profile. It was one of those boys that used to bully him in middle school. Baby got very quiet inside and

very still. What to do? What to do?

In an act of defiance Baby decided to stay, he wanted his boba, so what, so what, so what, he could be here too, all while keeping his eyes glued to the ground. Does he recognize me?
Of course it was sexual. Is that even interesting? All humiliation at the hands of beautiful boys is sexual. Baby knew he would never have had a chance to be scrutinized otherwise except through this bullying. Never on his back, as an object of affection or as ever worthy of being one… but as an object of ridicule yes, all things were possible through humiliation. Baby Bear had been recognized, had been known, not in spite of, but because of being quite an ugly little runt.

He had worn hiking boots to school one day was all. It made him feel sturdy and adventurous. When the boys sitting at the table behind him saw they thought it was so funny, they lobbed spitballs into his fur and asked "Why are you wearing hiking boots? Don't you know they're for HIKING?" (Later that derisive edge, so common in the voices of children who think they're so smart and you're so stupid and everything is so funny, would cause adult Baby to frown, lean over to pinch them.)

"Because I want to," Baby replied.

But inside Baby Bear was being made aware of his slender legs, and his chest, his hair. They followed him around the class just to mock him and he was aware of his shorts so cropped and tight, how narrow his shoulders were. If any one of them had really wanted to they would've been able to force themselves on Baby. Aware of his second hand shirt that only a week ago a girl had pointed out saying, "I used to have a shirt just like that."

The boy moved out of line and now Baby had to look at him out of the corner of his eye. Up and to the side and back down, up and to the side and back down flicked his eye. Baby felt very sneaky for a moment. Had he finally gotten the better of this boy who didn't know he was being watched? How would he feel if he knew Baby couldn't stop staring at his eyebrows? How would he feel if he knew Baby could hear everything he said in that small shop, "And yeah, it was a large Milk Tea boba please."? It was the attention a lover gives and Baby Bear was not his lover.

It didn't matter that anyone could hear everything he said in that small shop, it mattered that Baby could hear everything he said in that small shop, because Baby hung on to every word and Baby was a pervert.

So, he was finally outed to his readers.

Anyways, Baby wanted him to go now. He didn't want to be seen, he wanted him to go. With every minute that passed he chance of him being discovered increased, he wanted that boy to go now. The desire for humiliation to end is the same that begs, "Take me now."

Baby Bear came home later that day like nothing had happened. He had watched his parents have sex before when they thought he was asleep, so maybe nothing had.

On Earth many heads sprung up without necks, and arms wandered bare and bereft of shoulders. Eyes strayed up and down foreheads. Solitary limbs wandered seeking for union. But as divinity was mingled further still with divinity, these things formed together as each might chance, and many other things besides them continually arose. Shambling creatures with countless hands. Many creatures with faces and breasts looking in different directions were born; some, offspring of oxen with faces of men, while others, again, arose as offspring of men with the heads of oxen, and creatures in whom the natures of women and men were mingled, furnished with sterile parts.

A Sovereign Art

MIA PARNALL

I

A WAS ALWAYS at her best when she spoke to me about art.

'To the artist too long confined to the status of petty voyant:

It is no longer enough to say with the philosophers

I is another

But only in the purest affirmation of the creative act can the perfect white egg of the I emerge, with a shattering birthing cry!

It is my concern' – she began – 'to establish how we might assert the value of the artwork without degrading the status of the artist. The paradigm of value has failed in this respect. Instead, we must assume evil as our measure - and power.
And yet, the idea of artist as authority is long behind us, and authority dissolves at the hands of a sovereign art. It must overthrow entirely the artist to which it might return, on its hands and bruised knees, in a desperate

bastard bid for more blood.

Of course the author is dead, and his tools along with him – killed by a secret and delicious incineration. But without a public hanging we have failed to properly dethrone him. Or rather, in dethroning the author, we have simply erected false and hermetic gods in his place. We have glossed over his disappearance with countless puzzled advertisements: 'MISSING' posters that announce his fugitive departure.

But the poster for the sovereign art will bear the sign, 'WANTED', in the place of the artist.

The artwork itself will replace the artist, as a substitute authority, for whom it is only proper to assume the task of issuing this search-warrant against itself. Indeed, the artwork is both crime and judiciary. It exists shamelessly, while persecuting itself for doing so. The artwork is a self-cancelling machine.

It can never be cancelled,' continued A. 'For it exists only to cancel itself – with its endlessly internal contradictions.

The statue, the painting, the celluloid film, or the implosive Happening must possess this rigorously self-negating impulse in order to ensure absolutely that there is NO justification for its existence. For it to exist shamelessly in the world is for it to demand its place therein, to demand its portion of world to take place in, and therefore, the artwork is reduced to its function – to take up space in the world, or in the case of music or cinema, to take up time in history. But art is allergic to function. Do you see? Everyone can see just how guilty and lazy it is. To expect a disinterested neutrality from the average museumgoer is to drag a monk out of his cloister and into the town square, place him before the bronze equestrian statue that glints under the horrible sun and expect him to chant his morning prayers in the acedia of noon.

No longer will we tolerate the artwork's lascivious 'presencing' like an obscene flower in the hothouse of the gallery. The bronze statue may return to life, yet only to be kicked to the ground and trampled under the hooves of his horse. The artwork must contend with a nihility through an evacuation of all that the work IS from itself. But in the place of the artist is left an unequivocal void against which the artwork desperately contends, as if it is

allergic to the substance of its own blood. What is art? Empty palaces, lost armies, wandering concubines, thousands of letters without return address.

This amounts to a simple dialectic. The artist, rather than simply a non-figure in the consideration of the work, is an active negativity which diligently undermines the grotesque positivity incarnated by the material art object.

He is more than a pattern of traces left upon a body of clay, more than the scratches of Turner's overgrown thumbnails wrinkling the sky around his ocular suns – rather something which gestures toward a truer absence, a true negative mystery. The evidence of the artist's sordid love stains the artwork's material dimension and yet must remain aloof from it. On the other hand, the work longs to transcend its brute material nature, but is doomed only to be constituted thus. The artwork's defiance of its creator is limitless. Soon we will have a sacrificial new materialism drawn out of a bloodthirsty and autonomous system of objects.

Are you following?'

... Was I following? As far as I understood, the work of art was simply

1. A message caught charging through the forests of the past: sovereign begets sovereign. We can think of the work as a mutinous and sovereign child. take, for example the portraits of the loveless children of the first king charleses, in their feral silks, regarding their portraitist with a filial hatred of the pictorial preservation to which they have been consigned. How much they would like to expend themselves instead, to scorn and burn and play and to commit the insects of the palace grounds to death by glass lenses. In the same fashion must the work regard its creator: with the returned gaze of the ringleted boys of royals painted by old masters. Contempt, accusation, fantasies of slavery.

2. The criminal and the sovereign have this in common: both are exempt from the law, one momentarily, through action, and the other simply in essence. However this essence sprung from divine appointment: that original, criminal attribution of earthly power to the king by a faraway god. The work and artist in this way attain a kind of polarised equivalence.

3. To ensure the sovereignty of the work of art, the perpetuation of the sovereign line of artworks and, most importantly, lest we be deprived of the exquisite glare of the trussed-up painted Dauphin, we must accept the artist, too, as sovereign. The artist's power is like that of George III passing a law in a fit of madness that ensures his own abdication. The work must be inaugurated through displacing another sovereign being, an ongoing process to which it provides continual testimony.

'Those are the principles. The artist's work is one of an unceasing betrayal, a cruelty of which the sovereign alone is capable. The artwork possessing a limitless receptivity, a generosity only available to the sovereign. Only an economy of forgiveness could reconcile the pair, an act so terrible as to be comparable to murder.

But since this is not an affair of human nature, the allergic fathers and ambivalent sons of the psychoanalytic model can be left in the past. Away with families – on with the sublime geometry of succession. This is a natural comparison for, like the work of art, the nobility of the sovereign increases by its ineffectuality. The line of the Hapsburg jaws, for example, each creature more useless than the last, bears the crushing weight of absolute power within an ever more unsuitable incarnation. Recall jesus as a little child; a hard, sweet seed.

Imagine fathers begetting children in order to be devoured by them. Saturn biting his own tail. The immaculate conception of Rosemary's baby. This art rejects the parlour games of ideology: it is pure energy, the kind of energy obtained by breaking molecular bonds. Not art exactly, but without its chains. In William Blake's conception the creative subject is divided into four anthropomorphised parts known as the Zoas, signifying head, heart, loins and body. Fast forward 300 years and they are declaring nuclear war. The politicians hang up their coats. It's an antidote for our battered planet patched over with humanitarian documentaries and graphic design.'

It is a vicious art, I replied.

'And artworks will be warmongers. The artist, always losing or fleeing a bloody battle, must have access to some source of limitless supply. This is because the risk of artmaking is no longer constituted by a gamble of

material resources, but by spiritual blood. The new Zoas – type O, A, B and AB. I will reiterate that the violence of the artist is always in vain. The artist is only host and victim to a far greater violence incarnated by the work as cruel and hypocritical sovereign, as lawmaker and criminal. That is, Marina Abramovic finally stabbing herself in the heart.'

Accept it, the artwork is sovereign!

A hangs up. The night is lonely and dark in her absence.

The next morning, I receive the following message in three separate voice notes over Facebook messenger:

This text should be treated as the elaboration of a new and authoritative TABOO, an affirmation of the ecology of things. Only in the full acceptance of this state of affairs can the long process of transgression begin: the artist's signature will be a tattoo in the form of a spider on the body of a stolen lover.

Yours,

M

II

I am treated to a second lecture by A: her voice softer this time, but somehow more urgent.

'Last night I dreamed up a shaman, atop a horse with black fur.'

'I see him too,' I replied. 'The rider with his head in flames, criminal, radiant.'

‘But his stolen horse does not direct him homeward, to the happy mob or to the company of fellow men. This rider is just like the artist: in flight. The crime and debris that multiplies behind him is his art; the signature the fugitive hoof-stamps that shudder on contact with the sand.

In an unknown version of a famous tale, a princess named Turandot, whose modesty is matched only by her cruelty, sits high upon a palace balcony somewhere in western China. Beads hang from her hair like strands of ice, among which is nestled a small red face like a cottage in snow. The princess offers her hand to whatever suitor may guess her name. She hides this name from the world like a precious likeness. Turandot. But an incorrect answer from the suitor is paid for by death.

I’ve been thinking. What else is the smile of the Mona Lisa than that of cruel Turandot herself, a shadow upon the final view of your waking life across the Persian steppes?

And yet, on the lips of the artist, the word TURRRRRANDOT is the yelp of the rider fleeing like an arrow across the plains into the bloodthirsty dawn

Iaio!

Yes – the rider guesses, and he guesses correctly. In fact, his answer is just like a dart flying into the red eye of the sun. Yet he never returns to the cold palace, which for all he cares may have burned to the ground, and the princess along with it.

The trajectory of the red rider is toward one thing alone – oblivion. Flight for flight’s sake. We can hope only that the net of the universe will catch him and deliver him back to us; us, the mob, the masses, who can only look on terrified as epistemologies fall in sediment about them. This mob is not to blame, nor is it animated by some desperate and pathological desire for blood. Rather the civilians are filled with horror at the warfare that surrounds them, the din of bronze driving down on rooftops, the victims in marble, the turpentine floods… all terrible. No matter how many foot soldiers the universities will conscript to be flayed at their final degree show, the public will never consent to it unless they allow themselves to be bribed by the siren

of violence.

Can you hear it?'

Yes it is art's own poisoned name I replied

'Its name, yes. Let us have an example.

A metal hook lies on a table. It radiates the aura of its terrible use value; its curve a dark smile, or another phenotype of depravity. It proffers an equally dark set of choices: 'Deliver me into the hands of my purpose, or consent to admire me.'
The hook is in fact not a tool of any sort but a work of sculpture, by Giacometti for example. It demands not to be taken up as tool, but to be left quite alone, as a piece of art, to prevail in its for-itselfness. By drawing attention to its horrific set of possible appropriations at the hands of its human user, by itself, passive and immobile, it gleams with a rhetoric of innocence-until-proven-otherwise.'

(I see. A work which is no longer crime… but law!)

'It is instead the spectator in this uneasy conversation who must play the criminal. But it is not the act of looking for which he is tried, as he might be in a peep show or a gaze toward the sun. Looking at the hook is submission and a holding in tension. The crime is a secret and invisible germ, a fairytale of slavery to the tool: it is the imagined act of using.

The artist refuses to be used by the hook, so he makes it. Wild dialectic – the hook tears through the taut skin on our rider's back, through the nerves around the spine. It spins easily through the air, sending flesh flying, to land upright in the sand.

Silver and patient, here it remains until long after the imprints of fleeing feet have vanished. To some future archaeologist, it appears in the form of a question mark.'

?…

'I'll see you on Monday.'

This is the complete record of the significant exchanges that have passed between us so far. I am sure A is right, in fact, on most of these points.

Yours again – somehow more solitary than ever

M

fighting cancer

Miracolo, or Don Juan

AIDEN ABBOTT

'There occurred a remarkable celestial miracle; for Castor records that, in the brilliant star Venus [...] there occurred so strange a prodigy, that it changed its colour, size, form, course, which never appeared before nor since. [...] We say that all miracles are contrary to nature; but they are not so. For how is that contrary to nature which happens by the will of God, since the will of so mighty a Creator is certainly the nature of each created thing? A miracle, therefore, happens not contrary to nature, but contrary to what we know as nature.'

St Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XXI

i. Miracolo, or Don Juan

ALMOST 10 YEARS HAVE passed since I'd first come to visit Raphael. Back then, I'd meant to leave Rome after a week, but when the time came, I hadn't yet found a reason to leave, and so decided to stay. Things carried along like this for a while, the two of us sitting in silence on his balcony in the afternoons, spitting out apricot pits onto the street;

'Did you say something?' - 'No, why?' - 'Oh, I thought you did.' - 'Nope, nothing'; life was good.

A few months later, I took a job in a university library, and learned Italian by watching game shows in the evenings. When we'd first met, Raphael was still trying to make it as a playwright back in London, but had since given that up, and, without any bitterness at all, found work in a letter sorting office. One morning I woke up remembering that it was the second anniversary of me coming to see him. I remembered him picking me up from the airport that day; me waiting in the parking lot outside, watching the seagulls in the distance, circling each other in wild, noiseless corkscrews through the air; a little closer, Raphael's silhouette against the sky. Even from a distance, I could tell he already didn't know exactly what to say. I would learn to love him for this. When he got close enough, I remember taking him by the hand, and he, caught off guard, let it go limp inside my palm - I, taking this as a sign of his discomfort, quietly let go and watched it fall back by his side, dangling like a little leather purse. I mentioned all this to him in the kitchen over breakfast and asked if he wanted to do anything. He said he wanted to marry me. The wedding was six months later.

After that came the dog: Rosa, a German Shepherd, adopted from the pound, already approaching old age, sunbathing on the front stoop. The next year, we decided we wanted children and I fell pregnant on the first try - with twins, no less! I gave birth in the flat and, three times that night, passed out from the pain - he thought I was going to die - but by that evening, had two newborns cradled in my lap, one under each arm. One boy and one girl - yes, life springing off me!

The next morning, one of the trees that lined the street outside had collapsed out of nowhere and crushed the front window of somebody's car; Raphael and I had been watching from the balcony, each clutching a child to our breast, and he explained it must of had something to with the flooding we had had a few weeks before. I was still exhausted, only half listening, and remember myself interrupting to say:

'But in such fine weather..'

And then he let me know the boy had started crying.

One day, about six years later, once the two had grown up somewhat, and

had even learned to talk, my son was tugging gently at my sleeve and asked why Rosa had gotten so fat - as she walked, her belly was swaying between her legs. She was pregnant too, and that summer, gave birth to a litter of nine puppies, all of which we managed to give away, except the last, who, by some ugly mystery, had been born with six legs and two tails - a tiny chimera.

I called out to Sophia, my little girl, who had been hiding in her bedroom - not quite so happy as her brother to watch the contents of Rosa's belly spilled out on the kitchen floor:

'Sophia! One of the puppies has six legs!'

'Six!'

And she ran in from the other room, standing in the doorway, still a little uneasy:

'Yes Sophia, six legs - and two tails, as well.'

'One of the puppies?'

'Yes, one of the puppies.'

'Wow... A puppy with six legs and two tails. How special!'

With that, she peered around my legs and, with such shyness, crept over to go see the little creature for herself, crouching on her knees and running her index finger gently along the top of his head.

'Wow..', she repeated, rolling the words against the top of her mouth, 'a puppy with six legs…'

It was a miracle, the vet had told us, that he had survived childbirth. It was for this reason that, by Sophia's suggestion, he came to be called Miracolo - 'miracle', in Italian. There was even an article about him in a local newspaper, accompanied by a picture of Sophia, smiling, and holding him up to the camera; he, still pink and blind, squirming in her arms. As he grew older, Miracolo took a particular liking to the female members of the household,

insisting on sleeping at Sophia's side, his head resting on her belly, and at breakfast in the morning, under the table, with both tails wagging in the air, and his two back legs trailing limp along the floor behind him, would scurry between me and her, kissing us on the feet - a habit for which Raphael had affectionately nicknamed him 'Don Juan.'

'He's such a little freak, isn't he?' Raphael had once laughed, and Sophia, suddenly very serious, as if speaking from the pulpit, answered back - 'Never talk like that. God is making everything exactly how He likes it.' All of us were quite taken aback at this; it was the first time, I thought, that I had heard God mentioned in our home.

Miracolo's presence had turned Sophia into a little abbess, following him around the house, walking the way one walks through a church or a museum, with slow, sober footsteps, and watching over him while he went bounding on ahead, his tongue hanging loose over his bottom lip - she, always smiling faintly, like the Madonna in a Nativity painting; so serene.

One morning, I woke up early and ate breakfast alone - black coffee, a bowl of oatmeal, half a grapefruit - and half-way through, realised that not once had I felt Miracolo's wet nose against my ankle, or his paws pressed against my toes. Under the table, he was lying flat on his stomach, all six legs splayed out across the tiles. Invisibly, over the last few weeks, his life - that brief and funny thing - had been coming to a close. Sophia, somehow, had been the only one who knew this, even from the start, and had looked at him always with the tender resignation with which one might look up at a loved one waving goodbye from the prow of an ocean liner, pulling away from the harbour.

His body, still so little, fit wrapped up inside a serviette, with only his two tails and two back paws escaping at the bottom, and was buried in the garden that afternoon - food for the spring. Even Raphael (who, initially, had suggested the family keep one of the healthy puppies, and found himself outvoted three to one) was moved to tears, and on a piece of scrap wood, had made up a headstone. It read:

MIRACOLO, OR DON JUAN

2018-2019

Today, 2 years later, the four of us - me, Raphael, and the twins - have taken a trip to the beach. Last week, there was a story in the newspaper about a brother and sister, near Ravenna, who had gone swimming in the ocean together one night. The brother had found himself caught in an undercurrent, and the sister, peering down at him from the top of a boulder, had taken off her dress to twist into a rope by which to pull him up. Tragically, he only succeeded in pulling her in with him, and the two had died kicking against each other's bodies, buried under the rolling tide. Raphael, skimming through the paper that morning, had only briefly seen the picture of the ocean beating against the cliff face, under the long shadow of which the pair had drowned (the parents had refused to let pictures of the children appear in print), and, naturally assuming this was probably an article about beach holidays, suggested we make the trip ourselves the next weekend. He's put on a great deal of weight since we first met, and the Roman sun has turned his whole body bright pink. Sitting back in a deck chair in his swimming trunks, flicking through a magazine, he looks a little like a huge piece of fruit - a peach maybe, or a grapefruit. At my feet, my only son, sitting on his knees, running his index finger across the sand, etching out a nine-pointed star just beside Rosa's stomach;

'What are you drawing?'

'It's Miracolo.'

'Miracolo?'

'Yes Mummy - Miracolo'

Yes - and then I saw it: the one head, the six legs, the two tails - that came to nine points; Miracolo, our nine-pointed star, born under the low arch of Rosa's belly, exploding quietly in space and shot out into the wet earth. Yes, how perfect - a star for nine-pointed Miracolo. Miracolo who I loved because nature gave him six legs and two tails and still he was born and was happy - 'impossible, and yet there be was!' Miracolo, who needed exactly six legs because he never learnt to walk on four, and who was glad because six was exactly as many as he had; our Don Juan, the miracle birth. I had to stop

myself from crying.

'Ah! And there he is! So beautiful!'

'I thought so too Mummy, I think so too!'

In the distance, Sophia, standing by the shore in a yellow dress, watching the tide swallow her feet as it rolled up the beach, carving little rivulets between her toes. The sun is falling on her head like water. She turns back; I wave; she waves back, smiling faintly.

ii. 'Little children, it is the last hour…'

The summer after my children's 10th birthday, my mother came to visit from London; very ill; wanting to see Rome once more before she passed away; wanting to see her grandchildren. She died here. One day, early in the morning, she woke up, made herself breakfast, and a few hours later, when I had gotten out of bed and joined her in the kitchen, asked, very politely, that we take her to the hospital. All day, we were huddled around the bedside in silence while she drifted in and out of consciousness until, sometime around 4:30 in the afternoon, the doctor took me and Raphael to one side and told us she had died in her sleep. Just like that.

Once when I was little, we'd had a rat problem in the house. My mother spent the afternoon preparing a poison, and setting out little dishes all over the kitchen floor:

4 parts sugar

4 parts plaster of paris

1/2 part water

The rats, seduced by the smell of sugar, would eat up the paste - the plaster hardens in their bellies. They'd turn to rock from the inside out.

A few days later, my sisters and I were watching her from the kitchen - she was out in the garden, pulling the dead rats out of a plastic bag and scattering them across the lawn. They made a thump when they hit the grass. Immaculately preserved, like the saints. She must've known we were watching because I remember she looked up over her shoulder at us and laughed so loud. It was sunny out. She was barefoot and her dress tickled the backs of her ankles.

I knew she was dead that afternoon in the hospital because I touched her hand and it was cold and hard like rock.

Another time, she and my father took the whole family to mass - 4 sisters and 2 brothers - which was strange, since it wasn't Easter or Christmas and nobody we knew was being married or buried. The priest read from 1 John:

'Little children, it is the last hour…'

My older brother asked our parents what that meant over dinner that night; he, the eldest of the six, must've been ten or eleven at the time. I remember they looked at him across the table, and then at each other, smiling gently, and my father said, 'You are too young Stephen, it's hard to explain exactly. But I can say this: every word is meant for you - that goes for all of you, my little children - every word is meant for you.'

The morning before she died, my mother called her grandson over to her bedside and, running her thumb across his cheek, told him:

'Darling, what I have to say is very important. I have had a dream last night - a dream from God; not for me, but for you - He has given it to me to tell you because you are very young and you will not understand; I know your mother and father do not take you to church. She tells me she does but I can tell when she is lying to me. I don't mind so much, but you must try to remember this for me. You won't know this yet, but when you are older it will get very hard to remember things that are happening to you now, while you are still so young - but you must try not to forget. My grandfather died when I was your age - you have no idea how young I have been once, darling - I have forgotten what he looked like. That happens as you get older. I hope you live

long enough to forget what I looked like - but this you have to promise not to forget.

In the dream, we were standing together on the ocean, standing on the waves, and you were holding my hand - all of a sudden there was a light over the water. Awful light, like an atom bomb. Like Hiroshima. You won't have heard of Hiroshima. Hiroshima is a city in Japan. Many people died there - it was like the sun fell on it. So many died. More people than you know - maybe more than you have seen in your whole life. And so quick. In nine seconds, in fact..'

And as she spoke, she counted down from nine on her fingers, and her bones pushed against the inside of her skin, carving out little mountain ranges all down her hands and down her wrists and down her arms, and the bedsheets smelt like a wet animal.

'Yes, nine seconds - anyway, in the dream, we were standing on the water and there was this awful light, burning hot, so hot the ocean was boiling and burning the soles of our feet, and when the light touched you, darling, you were so awful. It turned you so awful, darling, I was holding your hand and it was so awful - there were dark scales all over your body, and in your mouth, rows of teeth piled up on top of eachother, like a shark's mouth; you were a demon at my feet. I could barely bring myself to look at you. But I saw you cup a little of the seawater in your hand and bring it to your lips, and when it touched your mouth, you disappeared. And I didn't know where you'd gone, darling, but I knew not to be scared because I knew you had gone somewhere good and you'd arrived there safely. I can't explain how, but I knew it. And when I woke up, I knew for sure the dream was from God, and I knew I had to tell you. It is so important to remember, darling, it is so important. I know you will not understand right now, but one day you will, and until you do, you have to keep it with you, keep it safe and promise never to forget, keep it safe like a precious gem. Keep it safe and promise you will not forget.'

I was watching him do his best to listen, and every now and then, as she spoke into his ear, I'd see my son's little pink hand rootle out an M&M from the bowl on her bedside table, and quietly slot them one by one into his little pink mouth.

iii. Francesco

When we were twelve, my twin brother was knocked over by a motorbike and smashed his skull open on the concrete. His brain stopped working and he forgot how to breathe. He had to spend three months in the hospital on a respirator, learning all over again. And it was so hard because, there we were, gathered around the bed, breathing without thinking and without knowing how to teach him - and him watching our shoulders rising and falling with tears in his eyes, not understanding how it had ever been so easy. The morning he came home again, me and my mother had made him a cake, almost dancing, barefoot around the kitchen, so excited to see him, and he, without realising, coughed up two great lumps of spittle, blowing out the candles; nobody minded - we were all too happy, and he was smiling so wide. Out of his mouth, from then on, that thick rubber tongue would peek out from between his two front teeth, gulping at the air the way a dog laps up a puddle. At the end of the summer, my parents sat me down and explained he wouldn't be in my class at school anymore; he was going to school somewhere else where they would know better how to take care of him and keep him from getting his clothes dirty. That was how it went; as the years went on, he watched me pass my exams and pick up work in a cafe on the weekends and go to university and struggled to understand how learning to grow up had ever been so easy; still, I didn't know how to teach him. But there he always was, watching over my shoulder as I did my homework or packed my bags to leave, studying my movements, watching me the way, when we were children, we'd go the aquarium and watch the clownfish swirl about the coral with our noses pressed against the glass; watching without coming any closer. And, always, with that thick, rubber tongue hanging loose over his bottom lip.

My mother called last week and told me how well he was doing. They have a new dog, another German shepherd, which he loves more than anything; the two of them even go for walks together in the mornings now - all by themselves. He's a lot better these days, she loves to tell me. I mentioned I would name my baby after him. 'The baby!', she said, as if only just remembering. 'That'll make him so happy - he's been so excited to have a nephew, you know. It's all he talks about. Sophia, did I tell you, he used the

word ‘foetus’ the other day? That’s very advanced isn’t it? Foetus. And he said it like it was nothing - we were just talking about the baby over lunch and then there he was, sitting at the table, saying ‘foetus’. Yes, that’ll make him so happy, you should come over for dinner and let him know.’

My brother’s name is Francesco.

Francesco, like the saint. Like the saint who preached to the animals and died blind.

Tonight I’m lying splayed out on the beach with my hand resting on the curve of my belly - nineteen and pregnant and alone, with the tide licking at the soles of my feet. Me and my baby together by the ocean that would swallow us both. When I was little, I remember being given a book with pictures of all the creatures that live down at the bottom of the sea, all bulging eyes and quivering antennae, swimming in water like black petroleum: water that the light won’t dare touch. That’s a little like how I imagine the baby now, floating in that blind ocean just under my stomach, holding fast to the placenta the way tubeworms cling to hydrothermal vents, belching out sulphur in the dark.

And now the sky is going black and there’s a fog settling over the beach: soft as spittle. Reflected across the surface of the water, the lights in the firmament, bobbing atop the waves: little sparkling embryos, pickling in formaldehyde.

If I were born with three legs I would count all of them as precious because nobody would teach me how to walk on two; and it’s like Heaven, where the Good and the Necessary are one, where everything that exists is perfect. So the miracle birth of a child with three legs announces that Heaven is not so terribly far away, that the Kingdom of God is amongst us. To work the miracle is to give the world what it does not want but will learn to need; for that reason, the miraculous and the ugly go through the world joined at the hip, like Siamese twins.

The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the Messiah yet to come: ‘He had no form or beauty. He was a man in suffering and knew how to bear illness. His face was turned away and He was dishonoured and not esteemed.’ And Saint Andrew of Crete tells us the Savior was a hunchback. Imagine how humiliated one

has to be to kiss a leper on the hand.

Once I read about a church in Poland where a communion wafer that had been dropped on the ground was found a few days later, marked with a little red dot. Scientific analysis revealed that the blemish had 'similarities with human heart tissue with alterations that often appear during the agony' - how totally obscene! But I have to want it more than air.

Yes; the miracle is ugly but it is something we will learn to need. Because we cannot live on bread alone. Everything that is strictly necessary is not enough: there has to be something senseless. So what I want more than anything is to give myself what I don't yet know to want; what I want is the miracle birth, and a child at my bosom to run free and senseless on three legs.

And I am so lucky because my birth pangs are at hand; from out of that waterlogged inner chamber, I hear the baby calling 'Be patient with me, still approaching, almost with you..', and, opening my thighs toward the ocean, I call back, 'Be patient with me too, Francesco, almost ready to receive you, ready to press you to my breast and give you everything I can hold in a clenched jaw.'

First, that thick, rubber head, poking out from between my legs - the gaping jaw, the eyes like black onyx - then the body, long and wet and cold, slipping out from the womb in spasms, gills flaring and fins kicking wild against the sand; at last, the tail, slapping hard on my thighs as Francesco slithers down the beach and into the ocean; until, finally, there he was. Just like that - impossible and yet there he was! - my firstborn son, the lungfish, my miracle birth, free at last, learning how to breathe in the shallow water; and there I was, fat and naked and empty as the tomb - and, with such tenderness, dipping my hand into the ocean, watching Francesco coil that thick, rubber head of his around my index finger - both of us, smiling, faintly.

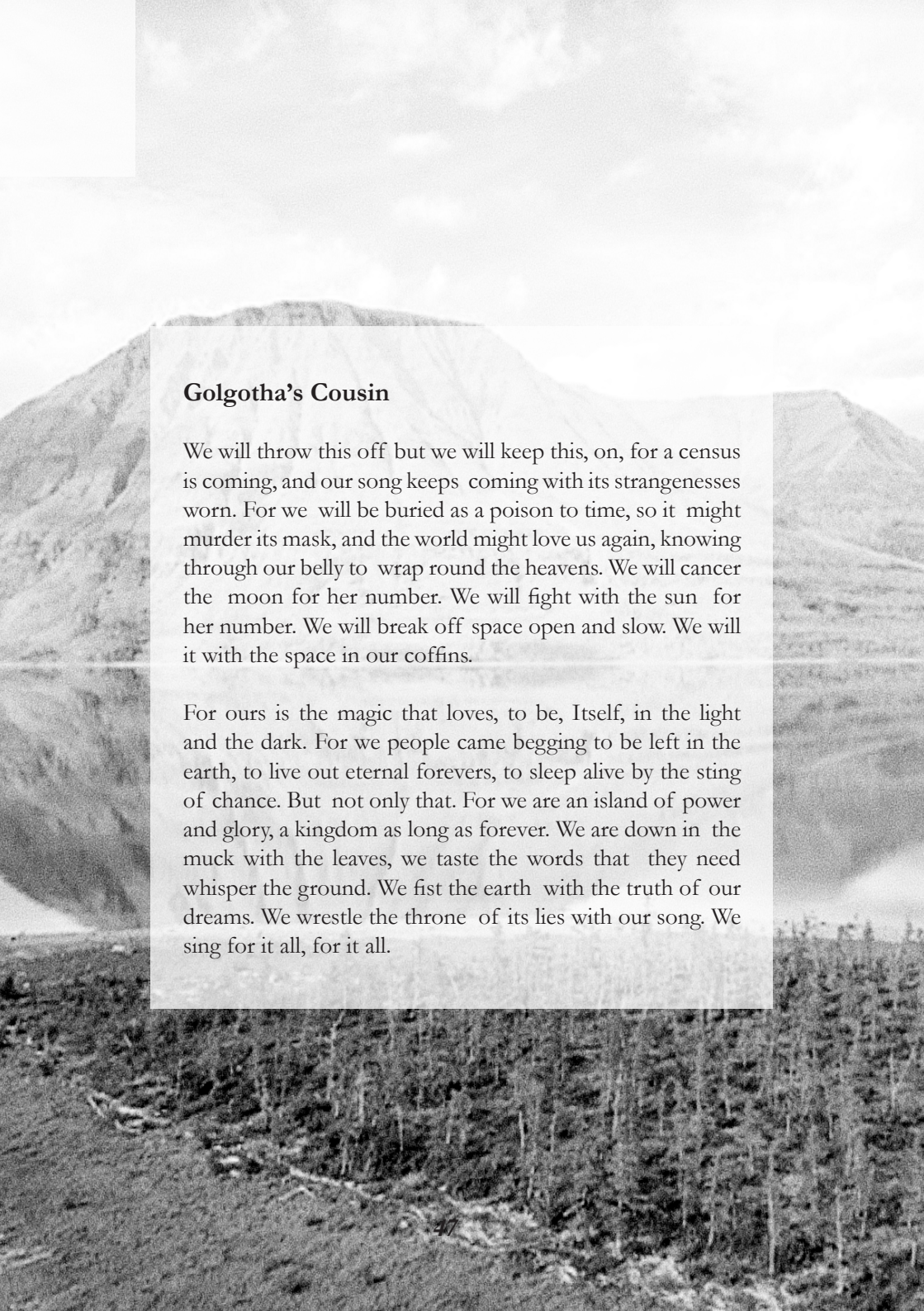
Three poems by

PHILIP BLANK

There Is Something Bitter To Taste

But we did deserve more flowers to wear, or to watch die. We deserved our roses, our marble stairs under blue skies. But the stars are not kind in their treatment, and life bears their repeating: horrible deeds done to fruit and their fixings. All despite red pleasure leaking, the pleasure of a face at being truly known.

What do we invent to light this cave? Something fake and familiar. Something to stop dead on the avenue, like the first day of creation. We want real fighting, real dying, real lies, as naked as the truth. A desire so thick it makes the heart die. Oh that would be worth: just to make great excuses be, to make madness go wild for free.



Golgotha's Cousin

We will throw this off but we will keep this, on, for a census is coming, and our song keeps coming with its strangenesses worn. For we will be buried as a poison to time, so it might murder its mask, and the world might love us again, knowing through our belly to wrap round the heavens. We will cancer the moon for her number. We will fight with the sun for her number. We will break off space open and slow. We will it with the space in our coffins.

For ours is the magic that loves, to be, Itself, in the light and the dark. For we people came begging to be left in the earth, to live out eternal forevers, to sleep alive by the sting of chance. But not only that. For we are an island of power and glory, a kingdom as long as forever. We are down in the muck with the leaves, we taste the words that they need whisper the ground. We fist the earth with the truth of our dreams. We wrestle the throne of its lies with our song. We sing for it all, for it all.

A Spire of Spires

A flag, a horizontal beam from end to end without ending, a vital engine shapes me from no thing to nothing, spreads me out into a thing auspiced by the moon-night's blanket bright. Out of great confusion my other things became, vested with wysteria, and purpose, and violence, imagining diverse infinities, endless others unrelated in their essences, but diamonds of apprehension.

Catch trust's shoulder in its pool, naked. Take insanity for a fast, time wasted lapping lost time around the pole and dancing. Let this time burn, and hurt the skin, this time. Fall off the chord drunk and boil with its interruption. Trust me this time, that the dream will expire, bent and faithful at last, love proven wrong in the rightness of a world that loves it too, lying in comfort like the god of beds of flowers.

Without Geometry

RODRIGO C. TAMAMES

I ARRIVE AT Anne's cottage late in the afternoon. It is already pitch black on a snowy winter's day – the Sunday we both agreed on – and I struggle to find her in the remote countryside. I'm not quite sure I have arrived at the right place, but there is only one wooded cabin at the direction I have been given. I can see lights from behind the curtains and finally bring my car to a standstill in a clearing in the forest. The hand painted sign over the letterbox reads 'Reynaud-Guérithault' and I know I have arrived. I leave the car with my belongings, tread through the snow, knock twice and wait. A head emerges from behind the window:

Bonsoir! Est-ce que c'est le journaliste ?

Her frail voice emerged the same as on the telephone, only to realize that she is addressing me, as she is inside by herself. *Bon-soir Ma-dame* – pretending my grasp of the language is more proficient – *c'est moi !*

She opens the door, and as anticipated Anne is the small elderly French woman wearing a wool cardigan and a metallic pince-nez I had seen in pictures. Her face is remarkably wrinkled and appears in good health, expressive. She greets me with large glass eyes moving moving in precise gestures: *Bonsoir ! Entrez, entrez !* she hurries me in from the outside. She is all arms and feet scurrying into the cabin; she is energized for a woman over eight-five. I enter her tiny home directly into the living room. I've walked into an enclosure all-

wooden and warm, well-heated but poorly lit except for a lamp hanging over and illuminating almost only a round kitchen table. On the table some scraps of paper, photographs, and a notebook which I assume serve the purpose of the interview.

I inspect the obscured interior whilst Anne makes arrangements in the kitchen. The space is held with multitudes – framed pictures, of unexpected *objets trouvés* on every surface, of books wherever they can be fitted. The room carries the weight of her whole life's movements. I notice a series of photographs scattered throughout the walls depicting a younger version of herself with the same group of women, side by side near mountains, in rural settings. It gives the impression that they hold a bond across the decades. From one picture to another their eyes luminous and without the signs of the passing of time. She returns with a tray of coffee: Alors, she gestures towards the chair, *Asseyez-toi*.

*

Yes, the philosophy class, we had the privilege of being a group smaller than the rest and we cherished this familial, intimate atmosphere from the beginning. Jeanne and I were already quite close but eventually became close to the other girls, too: Sarah and Miranda and Blanche. I'm afraid this was too many years ago and cannot recall the quieter, less memorable ones; we were never more than nine or ten girls around Simone. De Poitier let us know that she would teach us philosophy housed apart from the main school buildings, in the little summer house lost somewhere in the school grounds. It was once the groundskeeper's cottage; his simple terracotta walls, a wooden and straw roof above our heads. We rejoiced – meeting at this place was a source of pride to all of us. Perhaps because we could boast to the other girls how independent we were from the rest of them, even if for our assigned classroom, or lack thereof. It's a curious thing, how inconsequential changes in our routine would have us cheering or sobbing for insignificant reasons, and thinking about it today I'm afraid I can't recall why we would react like this at all.

I've learnt that events in our lives – reunions, funerals – we forget the details of, much to our chagrin, even when the memory held for so long. One lives many times and one cannot keep track of every passing circumstance. I,

however, have agreed to sit with you only because everything from my year with Simone is so vivid. At such an impressionable age, on the threshold of adulthood, my mind was as open to the world as can be. I realize the fact of this encounter as adolescents is of importance. One is not yet numbed by the eventual procession of events and characters that come in and out of one's life. The way Simone entered our lives was much like a distress signal in the night – unexpected; a lifeline.

She walked into the summer house for our first lesson and she asked that we rearrange the desks into a circle.
We did so in silence, and I think we must have looked at each other in disbelief. It was entirely unorthodox to break the classroom structure. As we did, she dropped her stack of books on a pupil's desk and paced towards the blackboard before writing in large chalk letters the word 'SIMONE.' With this simple gesture we understood that she would not be Mademoiselle Weil. She turned briskly and I recall her warning with a strange grin – 'my girls, I forbid you to have any books of philosophy. I forbid this.' Her warning given sternly even though she was smiling. We were surprised at her youth, not only her youthful appearance but the slight shrill in her voice.

She raised her tone – 'you are now in my own philosophy class and I will make you acquainted with the great thinkers myself. I will feed them to you.' She gazed at me across the desk circle as we locked eyes for the first time. Hers were pulsating. 'You will eat them whole.' She proceeded to sit with us in the circle.

This was a lie, of course. Her lessons began to unfold in the atmosphere of complete independence and from the beginning she avoided any dogmas enforced. As a reader of hers you may find this illogical, at once familiar with her assertive and opinionated tone. But this is just another piece in the puzzle: the way she changed from one text to another, the way her writing is so piercing and precise, but her lessons became so open, so sprawling. The way she announced that she would feed us – how maternal! – yet we realized that she taught us to feed ourselves. You really must know it was rare for the time for girls to be encouraged towards becoming free thinkers.

What was not a lie was her claim about the philosophy books. She arrived the first day, and every day after that with Homer, Plato, Goethe in the original

and would translate them for us there and then. We were never told to pick apart the texts, slouching over to prepare for exams. It became clear that she was too honest of a teacher to demand that from us. We started every lesson by debating the Latin maxims that she would scrawl on the board:
If the world is divine, all is well. Thought, freed from passions is a fortress.

'And, if so, what do you make of this?' she began the discussion. 'Do you think any of the passions, because they exert our self-control are all as harmful to our clear thought?' A group of sixteen-year-olds could hardly fathom. Blanche would often open the discussion in her shrill – 'the passion of the Christ was a good suffering, so we must suffer because of our passions if we are to live like him. So they are not noxious in this case.' She did not conceal her deeply dogmatic upbringing by a pastor. But just as eaten away by dogma were the rest, and so was I, in subtler ways. All our responses entailed a second hand quip from our elders – 'the Bible says we should,' or 'French history teaches us that…' Worst of all: 'Madame Macreau said that Pascal would say….'

This would infuriate her. 'Forget Macreau! Forget the testaments, and Robespierre, at least for now.' Simone spoke her mind with thoughts more lucid and open ended than anything we could imagine: 'Let's agree that the insatiable pleasures are the passion of the drug addict, the gambler, the drunkard. What do you think then pure pleasures consist of?' She would rise and walk around the desks, looking into the eyes of every pupil to make sure we had her undivided attention. 'For example – sport without championship; eating and drinking sparingly when one has worked well; the pleasures of friendship. And aren't they many?' It was easy to be impressed, to admire her. We became complicit with her every rhetorical turn.

'I think I'd agree with reservations,' Joanne replied, 'because even the pleasures of eating and drinking, as well as the passions of friendship, can become… terrible. We become obsessed.'

Simone was piqued: 'Yes isn't that so? And could you elaborate on that?'

I began taking notes from the very beginning. I started taking eager notes of her every word, because they rang inside me like a bell, even though she could speak them so softly. You must know, my notes of her lectures are

copious. Long before she became well-known I carefully archived all my records of her: notebook upon notebook of notes almost in shorthand. How much these notes have been used to reconstruct her thought project, and her life. It was impossible to have imagined it then, my God. The feeling of translating someone else's words into text felt absolutely pious and in a way there was only humility in me. I did not do it because of any vainglory. I was also responding to the fire inside me to consume her; what she said felt so new, so different. I wrote all my notes with the greatest care.

She lectured us always in response to our own remarks. One would get carried away in emotion when transcribing her words. I've always asked to be excused for the carelessness or errors in my notes; my wish is they be regarded as marks of my youth, my vigour, as a sign of their authenticity. In spoken lecture an inflection of the voice or a smile can modify an all too categorical statement, and our class was animated with voices and faces that could not possibly make it to the page. Sometimes Simone would respond to Sarah at once, and I would hastily write down her words but forget what Sarah had said. Readers should know that my notes are not a transcript; they capture a part of my soul in that time, our collective spirits, as well as glimpse of the great thinker. Every time read them, I have once more re-lived a year with Simone Weil.

On our second lesson, she set up a sign over the door of the summer house inscribed with the words "NOBODY WITHOUT GEOMETRY ADMITTED." I think Blanche must have asked if this was a reference to the holy trinity.
'My girls,' she addressed us in the circle, 'to do mathematics is to try to reach for one's independent thought – in this way one overcomes the tendency to depend on chance, which is a sin against the Spirit.' We heard about this more and more and she was not speaking of the Holy Ghost, but about the German 'geist,' an intangible human essence. A concept entirely novel to us. She explained –

'In action, one is helped by another action – for example, anger can be the midwife of courage. And there in mathematics, one is not helped by anything. One fights chance on one's own. And this is why Plato said: No one admitted who doesn't know geometry. I want you to learn to be free, independent in your thought.' We nodded at the last statement, although we couldn't reach it

by the means in which she had found its logical conclusion. Sitting in a circle with her stirred us full of what we didn't know we could be stirred with, this electric Geist. How could we have known she would deliver the insides of geometry, with secrets that weren't about geometry at all.

When the bell rang on the end of our previous class, we hurried to the summer house, rain or snow, twice a week. It was a wonderful namesake for the place that held our sessions. It reminds me of the aphorism, in the midst of winter I found there was in that small house something of an invincible summer. Because it filled us with joie and for the first time it it was all we had to be, joyful, against everything storming in our adolescent lives. And of course there is so much happening for an adolescent, Simone knew this. She did not demand that we take notes nor memorise any aphorisms, simply that we listen to each other and partake in the discussion. And this was a joyous development in our lives: we came and went to her sessions full of a new mirth.

We leaped from Plato to Giovanni della Mirandola in the same afternoon. We discussed wisdom, justice and truth with candour. Simone's tone would encourage us to discuss the importance of beauty, and one would think we were talking about colour, form, paintings. She taught us that aesthetics is not simply a branch of study, but works apropos of a higher truth which we climbed with her, it was all very intoxicating. How can I tell you what a whirlwind, how exhilarating this introduction was? How can I tell you how much I grew to love her?
The first time we spent time together alone, I remember vividly.

It was three or four weeks into her arrival, and all the girls had noticed that we never saw her partake in lunch with the other teachers on the high table of the main hall. We would always take our supper before our teachers would, so nobody could confirm nor deny if she joined them for that meal either. The girls – we would discuss at lunch the pieces that we could put together. Jeanne had seen her speaking to Madame Lumley in the corridors more than once, and we thought this made sense. Lumley was of an eccentric nature – she seemed ditzy and taught theatrically; sometimes she wore a hat with a long feather. Of course she was the teacher of dramatic arts and literature, on all accounts 'a character.'

The consensus on Simone was never so obvious. Other girls who knew her as assistant in their lessons thought of her as the quiet and dull type. That she was so young but appeared so disheveled, almost dirty, did not make a case for her brilliance for a group of provincial country girls. The others debated her character in front of us – if she made an effort not to overshadow the teacher leading the lesson, if she was autistic one of them thought. One of the girls said she had seen her walk pale and lifeless down the corridors. What a strange image, for us who had her in the summer house. We knew that she was anything but dull, lifeless, in fact her voice was a stream that would envelope us for the hour, an hour that would stretch into the rest of the day.

That week, we finished the philosophy session in the darkening afternoon, and Simone noticed I was the last to gather my belongings. She walked me out into the school grounds and we wandered together, carrying her pile of books between both of us, sharing the weight. This is when I first noticed her pale and wire-thin limbs, her frail wrists which seemed might crack under the weight. Her almost translucid skin made of glass, I made nothing of. She asked:

'My dear Anne, I've noticed that you don't engage much with your schoolmates, aside from Jeanne.' This was true both for Jeanne and for me, we would gather mostly by ourselves and gossip about Blanche and the others. I wasn't sure where she was going with this. 'By now I gather that you are quite the reader, and I'm sure you prefer to spend time of your own reading.' She assumed correctly. 'But, I must ask' she asked very passionately, 'do you have any problems with the other girls?'

The question caught me off guard. I wondered what kind of problem she might have been thinking of. My answer was something along the lines of my feeling detached from the rest of my classmates. Perhaps back then I found them boring, or unstimulating, and didn't particularly care for them. I only cared for Jeanne, to any extent, and only cared for the rest when I could discuss them with Jeanne before bedtime. Even though I had Jeanne, I felt terribly lonely and I think she must have, too.

We were walking by ourselves, alone in-between the oaks and leaves, so I felt at ease to speak my mind. No mortal can keep a secret for long.

Simone appeared concerned, and she said her concern regarded my never finding a rootedness, my own rootedness.

–

'One's rootedness comes from a truly active and natural participation in the life of a community. That's where our heritage comes from, Anne, this is our culture. We cannot live in isolation. It's something I've learnt myself, through much pain.' She lingered after making statements that required an explanation, but offered none.

We kept walking together and she encouraged me to engage more with my classmates, to cut down on my reading and day dreaming. This struck me as odd, because she was essentially asking me to socialize, rather than apply myself to my studies. A teacher, nonetheless. We arrived to the steps of the main hall and her face became awfully pale and she started breathing very heavily. Immediately she fell to her knees, it was all very sudden. I think I grabbed hold of her from her bony shoulders and asked if she was alright, *est-ce que ça va*? I don't think I had ever touched an older woman.

She quickly got back on her feet, dismissing it with a oui, oui assuring me she was alright. Her face still had an awful pallor. She confessed she suffered from low blood pressure, and was in need of some food, some sustenance: 'this happens to me sometimes before a meal' she explained. It was the first time of many that have replayed in my mind. Every time she would offer a different excuse, and so we were compelled to gather all the evidence. And it was too much. It became all too much for the group of adolescent girls in the countryside near Rouen.

Seizure

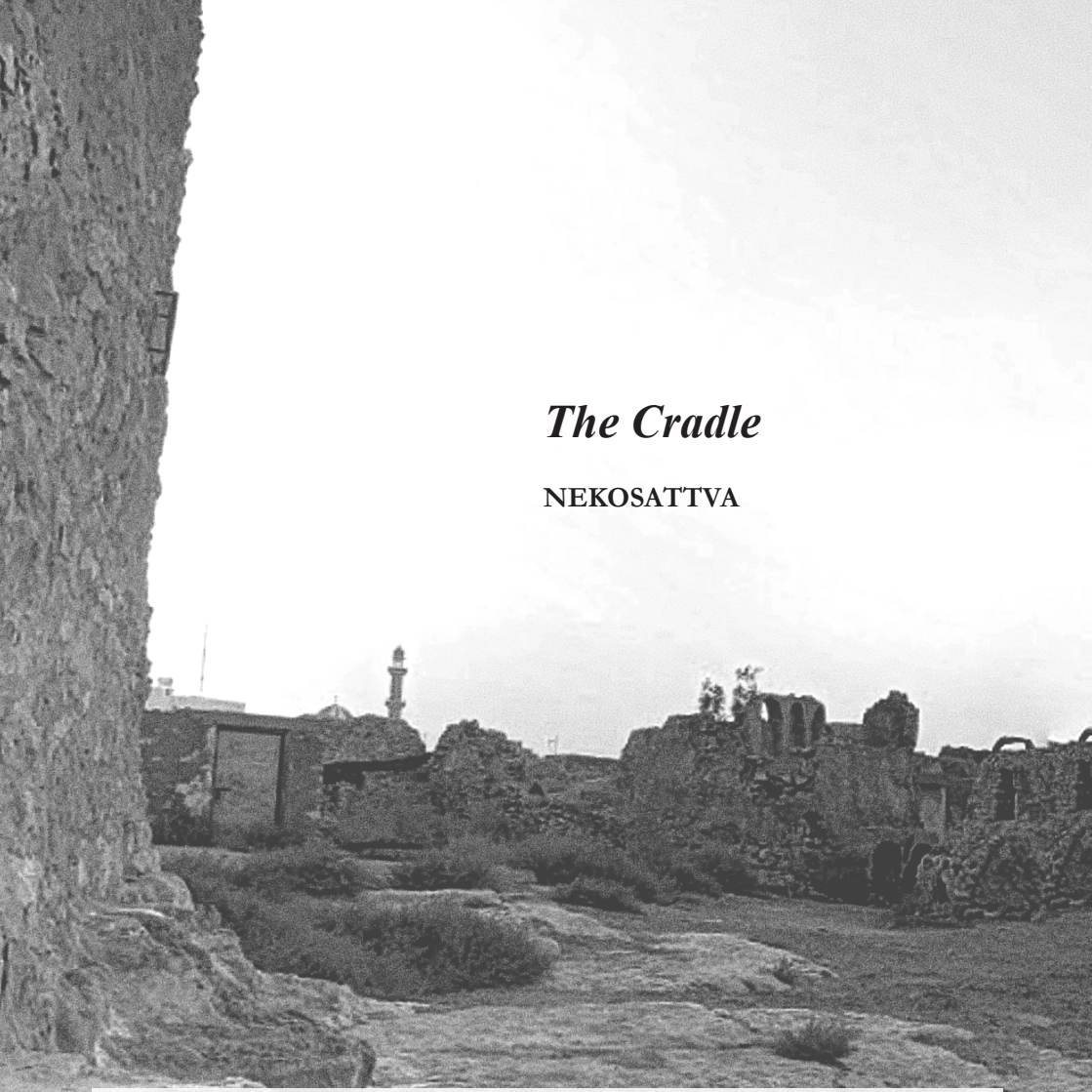
HOSTAGEKILLER

THERE'S A GENERAL lull before he's carried off. Each worker takes the time to individualize their grief. The manager ekes out a crude epitaph. Collective beepers signal a return to form. Another package reaches another door. Death has left the warehouse: the only way out. She weeps. God has left, she thinks, God has left. Crossing now, past another corridor, her lungs spit fire. On the ground now, doubled up under herself, the world speaks in stuttering starts. To the parking lot, crying. Lights dizzy into nausea. Some pulse juts, staccato, out of her neck. A bullet slowly drills its way out of the back of her head. Cancer of the mind. That's what it was, cancer of the mind. You could see it in her eyes, she thought. There was no consolation for that. The right emotions weren't getting through, or they were getting through too well. If God had really left, he'd spat in her mouth on the way out. It was no way for a young man to die, she thought, but the thoughts came in spurts yet again. How should a young man die, after all? Fighting an endless war? Hunched over the toilet? Waiting for someone, something? She wiped the vomit off her shoes.

Every block was its own intricate set of cracks, valleys, rifts, pressed gum and shit. Nothing but bobbing heads if you took the time to look up, bobbing heads to work, bobbing heads to school, bobbing heads to cradle, bobbing heads to grave. There were two kinds of dying: too soon, and too late. If you died too soon, if you died a baby, your future died bright. If you died too late, as most do, you died past hope. There was no dying on time. Not here. The whirring, the beeping of machines. Dancing little beeps. Hearts set in new

tones. Victoria, the woman spoke, you've better things to do, haven't you? It was likely the last time she'd be asked that by this particular woman, and while this was technically speaking, some kind of tragedy, it settled into its little niche as nothing more than fact. I came, Victoria started, because I felt I should. I'm here, louder now, because I feel I ought to be. The woman smiled. Victoria placed her head in her hands. Why had she come again? Because she felt she should. Teeth settled into a ground out groove. Something sharp welted beneath her eyes. The woman continued to speak, something or other about something or other. Victoria sunk her fingers deeper into her temples. Can I not visit you, she started again. The woman laughed. It was a deeply white room, and it all smelled cleaner than it should have. An antiseptic, disinfected kind of lack. There were kids laughing outside and the telltale creaks, the eee-err, eee-err of a swing. The eee-err, eee-errr, of a swing. If you died a baby you weren't going to heaven, but you weren't going to hell. Then what was this, Victoria thought. Not quite heaven, not quite hell; had we all, babies, died and not known it?

She rifled through chocolate bars and soda cans; cigarettes, sugar, and salt to kill the time. It was some excuse for human contact. The kids were gone. Everyone was gone. At this time of night even the hospital's leftovers felt they had stayed their welcome, and so they left. The dead and dying could be seen tomorrow. In came a man, and this man, well, you could hear his sobbing through the small aisles, hear that he wasn't well, smell that he wasn't well. The man too, rifled through chocolate bars, soda cans, not so much as choosing or thinking, but weeping all the same. There was another set of smaller footsteps behind the man, a girl, a bald little girl. Everybody dies, Victoria thought, everybody dies.



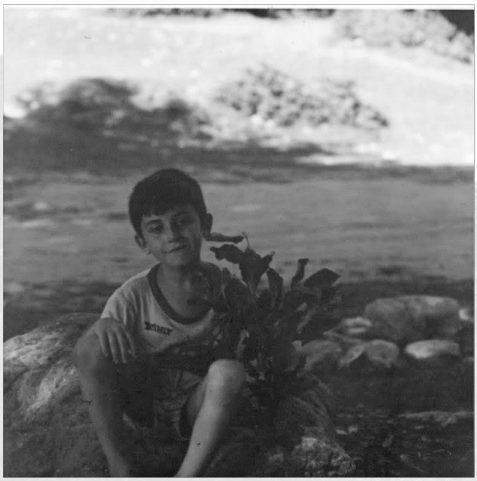
The Cradle

NEKOSATTVA

THEY'D COME FROM all over; I heard it in their words. I stood there at the edge of the cliff faces. I was eating a peach with a knife, sucking on the flesh. They'd been excavating since dawn, sun-disk G-D peaking over the edges like a voyeur. Honest— I had the terrible sense that this was the seat of nowhere, the birthplace of nothing, and that we'd waste most of the morning wiping the sand from our faces. They'd come from all over the world; disease rotting their extremities. I felt unease. Impatient. Tell me something about yourself.

“I was born there.”

I was never given a name... well, though I'd always worn one, to later shed like a coat, brushed away from my shoulders. I'd heard of some boys who'd been given a name at birth, a jewel they could hold on the tip of their tongues. Somewhere high up there, boys say their names in hushed voices to each other, for fear that others might know them. I see it from my window, the way the walls ran by the edge of the river, the splendor of the tower that disappeared into the clouds; I imagine myself a new name, one that might burn your tongue as the sound of it rushed to your lips. All of us spend our lives with necks pitched to the sky, shivering there in the cold of its shadow. Oh— I’m rambling again. You must think of me as such a homebody, but really I’m so much fun.



I never knew my father. I knew what he looked like, I knew that he had many lives, a different name for each one. No-one cared to remember anything about him. He died a penniless, miserable man on the side of the street. That thought about his death is all that he left me. Boo-hoo!

I felt the television buzzing on my face, or maybe it was the opium smoke irritating my nose. Ah, warmth came peeling through the windows.

Eyes closed— something tickled at my throat and I wheezed, I shouted. I grabbed at things, at something— carafe of wine, chamber pot, empty barda□ı. I stirred with my clothes bundled on top of me, like I'd poured out of it and spilled into the chair. I opened my eyes gently, unwilling to face the orange sun pouring through the silk, watchin' my little toe peek out from beneath. The television was flickering, stuttering in a lost ancient voice 'tween the channels. It's so hard— letting 'em all clatter onto the floor, crawling along the moist carpet towards the bright, uneasy lights. What are you telling me? I smack the sides of it, demanding, and now its radiation burns hot on my face; a relic of a forgotten time when light burst and then immediately faded, a youthful spasm rattling throughout the blackness to appear as only an instantaneous, beautiful white spark before me.

I sit before it on my knees, letting the errant static touch my naked body. Ah. I get it now. You're a real bad man.

With a knife, you undid the buttons of my blouse, and every cut revealed a little bit more of the landscape. You carved mountains, hills, valleys & canyons with your eyes as you scoured what was before you. I named all of it; the moles, the freckles, the welts & bruises. You told me that even though no body had similar geography, all united in their unique imperfections, the map never changed and that as you could carve the other bodies, so could

you mine. My hair stood at attention. I heard singing further down the halls of the opium den, the words misshapen, crude vowels: if I could twist the sea, would you return to me? The sound filled up the space inside me, and I shook, I whined, a cold knife running through me like butter. "Ayşe," my body now bore my new name.

"I'd never had a name before," I tell him. He fondles me, touching my misshapen sex. Cold; from the window I could see the women passing by beneath me, some letting their black hair show through their veils, bright vegetables drawn behind them. I hear the children playing, innocent shouts drowning in the white heat that hung like a shroud over this place. "I'd never had a name before," how could I ask you to point to me in a crowd of prayer? How could you write of me to someone else? Without a name, a person has no history nor past. She is born again in every moment; like a wounded animal, she's hitting her head up against the wall.

I turn away from him, covering myself again with the blouse. I set my face up to the curtain of beads, letting them hang from my face. The singing slowly died away, muffled by cloth. A man watched me from down the stairs: the moustache beneath his nose wet and willing. He has a cravat colored like blood. He's got an inscrutable expression. He's so weak, I could violate him. "Where do I come from? How old am I?" I turned away from the beads. "How old am I?" I asked him again. He smiled, undoing his pants. The metallic, salty taste of him reminds me of crustaceans floating in the sea water, of something that lived long before me. I embraced him, as I'd embraced many before. "Ayşe," his throat rasped. Say it to me again. Say it 'til it's merely mundane fact.

After he'd washed me, he'd dressed me up in the finest of silken gowns, adorned with jewels as if I were his daughter. "I have no children," he told me. "Once had a wife, but I'm the only now. No-one's left." I held his hand, I squeezed it tight and asked him to take me somewhere. "Oh, anywhere, I don't care." I held his hand as he guided me down the stairs, through the cubicles fashioned of hard oak that grew like dragon's limbs, lion's paws, the beak of a crane. I watched the sunken faces of my friends disappear beneath a long pipe angry with billowing smoke, their bodies laid upon a bed covered with dirtied rags as bardağı & wood crackled 'neath our feet. On the carpet beside me, dribbles of water fell from a young girl's mouth onto her

naked bosom, the rest of her body cloaked by flowers, by teas and spices, by the dirtied lira, by an old man's drool pooling together beneath her chin. I covered my mouth with a silken veil, exposing only my eyes to her divine beauty so as not to pollute her with my flesh. She groaned; a song once again flowed from her lips. I squeezed his hand, I asked him to take care of me; I couldn't understand her words, and she disappeared to become merely another shape in the sweet smoke like the others. I squeezed his hand; I was surrounded by apparitions, but they faded away into the white before I could point to them. I squeezed his hand.

Before me, the streets twisted and pulled away into every direction, and further down they'd abruptly fold into the sky. Oh and between us a cat wandered, its tail curled in anticipation as dribbles of milk slowly spilled from a pipe. When I wake up, I smile a little bit because I walk backwards; I think of everything we'd done in my bed, on my floor. I have a little sweet tooth; I suck on a spoon filled with hard honey. We walked down, surrounded by wet clothes waving in the wind. A few gentleman watch me from their table, their guts engorged with food, their lips moistened with tea— I hear laughter, the dropping of the dice and the women covered in cloth that sell their broken relics in the evening sun: hazy glassware, dirtied pots & pans, torn clothing, children's toys that no longer catch anyone's eye. I pulled him away, impatiently I wanted to sew the sky with myself, just a 'lil pollution you do to make yourself of this world. We followed the sounds of commotion where a crowd had gathered in the field beside us, down the path between the crackling, groaning wooden shacks that loomed over us. We passed through

them, laughing, dressed in their finest robes & jackets, Western fashions patterned with the color of wood. A few women stood without their veils, hiding their teeth behind sharp fingers. It felt excessive, too much air expelled from their lungs. I pulled on his hand, roughly.

And the sign above them read "Istakhr," their faces painted blue and pale. They didn't seem human, moving like monkeys, their faces stuck in a permanent smile like a skull without skin. One was feminine, one was masculine; I could tell by the smooth tenderness of her and the casual cruelty of him. They fell onto their hands and knees, coo-ing like beasts to the delight of the audience. I felt disgust in my body. They howled in a tongue I couldn't understand, debasing themselves by rolling in the muck, the shit. " Ayşe," I said to myself. There I was. Without a name, you'd disappear into the glue that held one history with another; you'd become part of the dust that lines these ruins, the dust that degrades everything it touches. The monkeys tossed, they flailed. They relieved themselves and everyone laughed, faces pink with joy.

"It was so long ago," I barely remember my old life. He was there; he'd loom over me like the Sun. I was scared, crying loud— the walls screamed along with me, echoing on the concrete. I carved your name into the wall because I couldn't carve my own. And into the ground, I carved it out as I remembered it— everything withered away except for the stone & concrete, broken by the wind. Gone were the courtyards, roofs & towers; it slips through all fingers. The gates are limp, cold and no longer mark the territory. Every height fell to the same uniform flatness, as everything that ages does. The soil with its soft grasp pulled the dead into it, its children and their children and us too; with us dies our petty ambitions. Stained with red; with yellow— it survived the rulers who conquered it, but in the concrete your name still reads. In the winds, it persists, bound by rusting razor wire & dull fungal growth. Can you see it as I carved it? Can you see the tall towers that loomed over me? The bath houses that boiled with abundance, full of sounds & smells, the noise of laughter, of love, in the streets where we could feel each other— but now it's gone, the brave and yellow-bellied both dead for reasons that don't matter no more 'n now the rooms are empty of children, the windows show nothing; the rulers dead, the soldiers gone, the women dust. So the graffiti fades, tiles broken like tears onto the ground where once pearly necks, fingers lined with gold, teenage warchests of silver and breath stale with wine & wealth, heaving stomachs lined with jewels looking down on us from the

balcony— it was all for nothing if not for the pillar which bears your name.

"You're always so self-serious," always going on about something. This is why I left you at the side of the street that night, alone, in whatever rags I found you in. I'd say you'd be nothing without me, but that doesn't mean anything to you because you're so comfortable being nothing. If it all disappeared the next day, you'd barely notice. You're a self-satisfied little whore.

It did all disappear the next day. I always thought it would be more like a wilting flower. I love little pathetic poetries like that. I looked out of my window, and I didn't see very much. It made me feel so disgusted; I jumped to the floor and vomited into my bedpan. I'm still not sure what I saw that revolted me so much, but revulsion hung in the air. I saw myself in the blackness of the television screen, now repulsed by my own naked form. "Ayşe," I run my fingers across the scarred tissue; shame burning at my fingertips. They taste of dried wine, a trail of red running down my navel; ending at the mouth of the river. I cover myself and wade through shambles down the stairs with uneasy posture; I feel like crying. I close my eyes, I see exhibitions of myself dried, lifeless; yes, everything defaced, turned to a mere thing. I spit up wine. Ignore me, please, when I have such tantrums. Maybe it won't go away now, but it'll probably go away in the end. Oh, don't make a big deal out of it.

"You think all it needs is a name," that's such polluted thinking. Thieves & criminals know all about why the caged bird sings; they know all about the light in the flicker of the flame, the name of the rose. I don't regret pushing you onto the floor, like I did a dozen times. Eventually you started to reek of the bathroom floor piss no matter where you'd been.

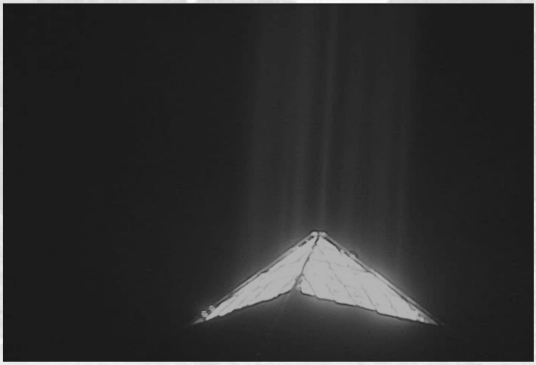
I shambled down the stairs. I felt everything creak beneath me with new heaviness 'n what was once regal gold, shimmering as the glow of the sun, I find now crumbles under my fingertips. What I thought were beautiful carpets weaved with blue & gold thread, what I thought were chandeliers & furnishings encrusted with precious metals, what I thought was the shimmering brilliant eyes that are brought to life by a vivacious flame... it was staring at me from the window, I felt myself shrink in its imposing presence. Feeling prey; I ran through the many rooms filled with empty beds, dark stains the only remnant of life. No room seemed familiar, though no room

felt novel either with its repetitious, unremarkable walls— it gives in, crying for help. Wounded animal. I got an appetite for shiny things. I look for beads in the soil, I came up empty-handed. Is it appalling to say that I miss your shape, next to mine? I lived for the clichés, now that's the entirety of my birthright. Was that so wrong? And you took everything from me. I had such little to take. I turned into such a serious, uncaring person after that. I turned coarse, like a plant drained of its water that now clenches its withering leaves. I fucking hate you.

With their ropes tied to the pillars, they pulled, for hours until up it rose where only a shadow once stood. For a brief second I saw it. I saw the face of my dead friend dance there in the sand, the smile I'd missed. My eyes blinked and it was all gone. I took another cut of a peach. Gambler's luck. No, I've been a good man these couple of years.

Sometimes I get over myself; I suddenly get the urge to dance, to sing and make love. I wear what you bought me that other day, with its beautiful satin & fur & wool. I don't know what it's made of, but my touch lets my imagination roam. I remember; it stood there in the distance, so small I would reach for the sky to grab it. "Istakhr," the neon lights dazzled me; they sizzled as they touched the fine plastic. A procession of white passed over us, I put my face up to the window to see them, to see the giant stone statues of men crumbling into the sand. The rooms grew like the branches

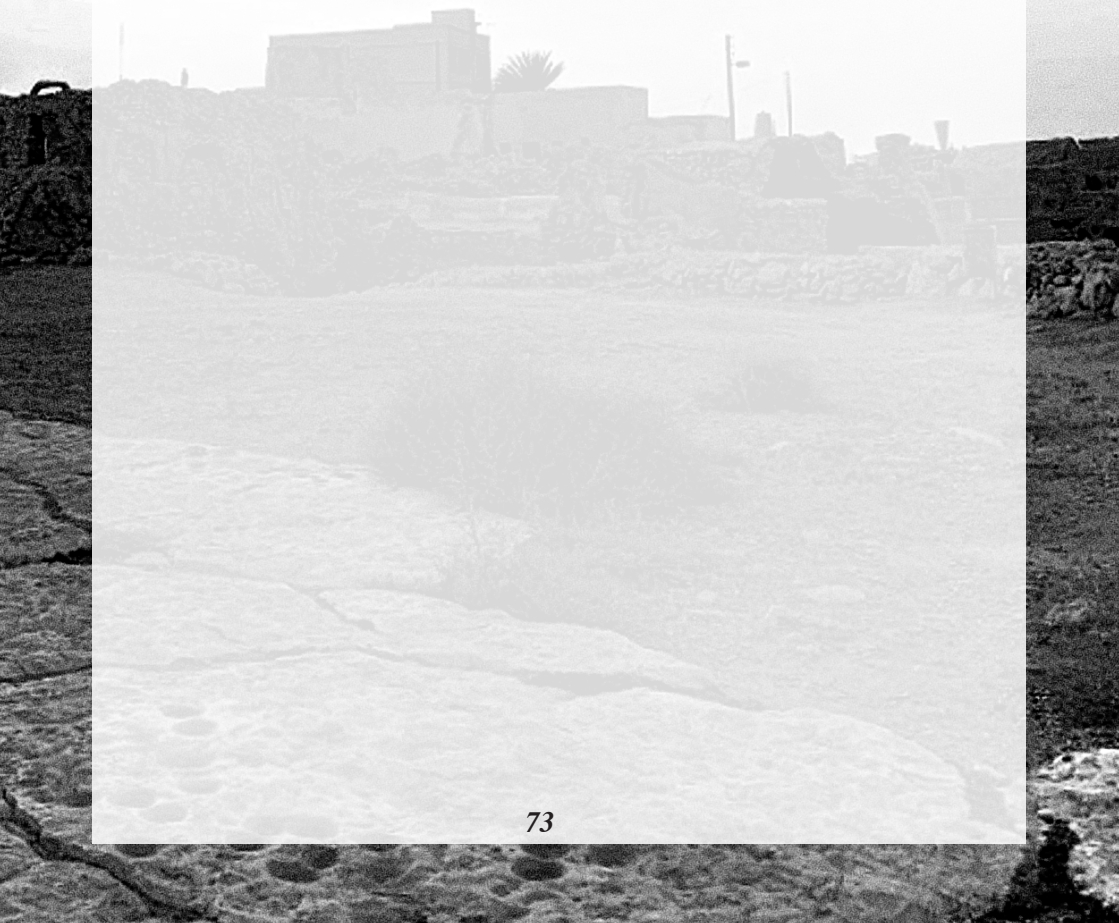
of the tree, flowing into even greater rooms and I realized it was never just a crumbling wall with my shape, a stairs and a carpet and a woman's thigh but rather that all these were just one leaf of a branch that begun soft & willing & young and grew wilting, hardening & turning grey and dust. Further down the escalator, the engraved displays of cruelty & plunder gave way to a sea of green felt & slot-machine chrome; in my ears, coins rattled and little pixel chirps boomed & blurred. I wish I could describe it, beautiful beyond approach and you saw me spill a tear and you wiped it away as I knew you would. "You're mistaken," I heard. I've been a good man, but I'm tired of waiting. You wipe the dust from my chin. "Waiting?" The sky disappears behind me. "Waiting for another chance." He rolls the dice. I shake the ice cubes in my drink, and I smile; you demand a kiss for good luck, and I can't help myself. I realize now I never knew you, and I don't think anyone ever did. I hear music booming through the floors, life from another plane slowly smothered until it becomes a dull whine. Everything. I take a sip. Let our children dig for the answers.



He put his hands on my shoulders and it all faded from me— nothing but that, approaching us in the distance. I'd never seen it before like that. With every mile that it grew up on us, a wall melted away and revealed an entirely different view— the same but different. It was as if I tried to circle your house and come in thru' the back door, but your house revealed with every corner an entirely novel side, and that no matter how many corners I turned, how many sides I circled 'round your house, it presented an entirely new face.

Oh— I should have treated you better. I should have slept with him, or her. I should have picked left, instead of right. What an awful color. I see now that all the different hallways I'd looked down and walked away from were actually one and the same— I saw that as it approached, the way things could have been existed only in my imagination because everything was happening as part of a greater motion, and that I was only a single molecule dancing as an ancient wave of salt swept me up in its motion. As it approached us, hovering over us like a lens eclipsing the sky, I wanted to walk away but no matter the direction I took, I always saw it there growing on the horizon. And the rest of the landscape withered away.

"Ayşe. The cradle," you pointed it out to us. He put his hand on my shoulder, so softly. You'd never been so cruel to me before. He whispered in my ear. There's no reason to cry. I felt something well up in my throat. Everything's alright. I'm not your father. I'm not your lover. Nothing's wrong.



Hijacking The Factory

RED VIRGIN INTERVIEWS NEKOSATTVA:
Founder and editor of NEKO GIRL MAGAZINE

RV: Reading NEKO GIRL reminds me a lot of talking to a boy I went to school with - he was one of those kids who would pull out his phone at lunch to show you videos of animals getting hit by trucks on the motorway to see if he could make you throw up. What were you like as a child?

NS: I'll admit, I was similar as a child. One strange memory really sticks out in my imagination. I was showing some horrible gory videogame to my friend on my father's Windows 2000 computer. Right as the Nazi exploded into a meaty crimson flower and covered us in slime, an error message popped up and froze the entire screen. I was enthralled; I then understood the arresting power of the shade red. I'd fill white page after page with the color red, spurting out from primitive organic shapes, with my father assuring the school authorities that it was only juvenile mimesis of Alien, Terminator 2, DOOM...

Though you can tell by the magazine's girl-y posturing that I identify much more with my maternal influence. My mother was a Gnostic zealot, if such a thing even exists. She was a scholar of early religious history, formerly a Near-Eastern archeologist, obsessed with secret histories and various apocalypses. She'd often whisper in my ear about the coming of another epoch, the illusory nature of mere flesh, the endless cycle of birth-death-rebirth that holds as natural law. She had a vicious anti-humanist streak, once remarking that women should cultivate trees instead of babies.

She was also a child of failed revolution, who was only saved from the certain death dealt to Communists by her instinctive cynicism and eremitism. She'd endlessly tell me stories of rotting dead in the street, loose skin hanging from the tree branches after bombings, as if to assure herself that she in fact hadn't herself been splattered onto an anonymous wall so many decades ago. My earliest childhood obsession was a gift from her, a book on Ancient Egyptian religion and rituals. She had an obscene gift for language, freely switching between Farsi, Hebrew, Armenian, and "Queen's English" when it suited her. Even the very words I'm using here have maternal origins: she forced me to speak only English at home, read only English books, and pay no mind to whatever was spoken outside.

All of which to say, I was a very shy and inward child. Under such powerful postpartum influence, I had little to speak of as an identity. I'd reckon myself, my personhood, was only born when I'd realized I could not only break the rules but also be punished for it by mostly maternal figures of authority.

I think you can extrapolate the rest. I liked anime more when it made mothers angry.

RV: Turning to your iconic display name, 'Nekosattva.' Historically speaking, Bodhisattvas delay their own entry to Nirvana in order to remain in the world and advise mortals on the path to enlightenment. What about now? What does it mean to be a digital sage in 2021?

NS: Firstly, I would completely disavow self-help, the greatest brain-disease of our time caused by the particularly traumatic secularization of Western culture in the 20th century. One should first accept that there's really no helping yourself; the first mistake of a fool is to assume that possessions quench the appetite. I despise this posturing that seems to be vogue with a particular set of high-aspiring-low-exertion 'cultural workers,' in which 'wisdom of the past' is used as a cudgel to beat some substance into mediocre work. They buy a dusty book off Amazon and think they've reached new spiritual heights—a lot of work out there mistakes niche for depth.

I hope it's clear through NEKO GIRL MAGAZINE that we operate with suspicion, hatred of the common sense wisdoms and folk-cures. Characters in our magazines enforce violent sedition upon themselves, cutting away what ties them down with gruesome results. Bodily disfigurement presents itself because our bodies are inevitably avatars of our minds. Mishima understood this best; his manufacturing of a violent samurai revolt echoing the Satsuma Rebellion allowed him to conform the physical substance of his body to a deadly fantasy. Violent revolt, directed towards yourself, is a necessity for self-actualization. Of course, it's unlikely you'd survive this. Yet as the only true digital sage, I see it as my duty to advocate for this violent revolt. Good artistic expression is self-destructive, your reputation is one of its fuels.

Or to put it into Zen terms: "Let me show you the path on which there is no coming and no going."

RV: The NEKO GIRL project acknowledges that the computer world is very much a phenomenological and libidinal reality - as much as the web is a Gestell or apparatus, or even a tool, it's also as an environment, molded by indigenous laws and unpredictable forces, and a site for lived intensity. How can we perform an experiential 'hacking' of the internet - are there limit-experiences that are uniquely possible online? How does one lose oneself on the web?

NS: The perception of the Internet has changed so rapidly, from society's greatest threat to the only institution still keeping it from collapse. I'm not sure how long this can go on. You see the entire population is constantly exposed to the limits of their own understanding; depression on the rise in teenagers, mass societal distrust, and a complete suspicion towards everyone and anyone. Rather than us entering Pynchon's zone, the Innerzone is swallowing us all up 'till there's nothing but zone—places have ceased to exist, there's only paranoia providing continuity at the periphery of the global markets. And its all greased with young pussy and liquid credit.
For an unruly, kleptomanic child, stealing intellectual property through an involved and technical process felt like crawling through the Ho Chi Minh trail. I think the Man understood that too; we've been led to what I would say is an absolute dystopia of authoritarian social control—that even friends &

strangers can be rewarded with some kind of vague social credit for joining in. Fear lubricates the tubes, keeps 'content' relevant and novel and the Self unstable; we always believe our anxieties and fears are new and uniquely ours yet cling to others like us. There is its true intensity—no history ties it down, and everything is reborn at every moment.

So truly, one has to lose herself on the web. And tragically, this has no beauty nor spiritual depth—our great monuments to the web's power of self-destruction are the Instagram stars who airbrush themselves into numerical perfection. There's nothing behind the eyes of the tortured except Google AdSense.

Or to quote Olalquiaga: "contemporary schizophrenia confronts heterogeneity with neutralization, confusion with repression, and referential absence with informational deadweight, legitimizing surveillance as the only mechanism that can provide both control and pleasure to a culture lost in its own specter."

RV: In your work, 'perversion' seems to describe a kind of strategy, or a resource maybe, for rejecting and undermining the social world - 'hijacking the factory', as you put it in the editor's note in the first issue - does NEKO GIRL's message have an application for practical life, beyond the internet? What would you like us to do, Nekosattva?

NS: I say 'hijacking the factory' because ultimately that is the root of our relations to one-another; we appear to each other as commodities. We live and die by the marketplace, and the smart ones know how to divide themselves up and play the auspicious stereotypes: "activist in the streets, arthoe in the sheets." We're the product ourselves, reproducing value.
NEKO GIRL revels in property damage via self-harm because that's the only place you can hurt the factory: you are the machinery, you're the cogs, the grease. This process is exceptionally painful, and I think inaccessible to most. It means you must cleave parts of yourself and how you engage the world, following the example of the Skoptsy who see their genitals as the site of reproduction that perpetuates Man's fallen state. You in many ways become unintelligible to yourself, and your own physical/mental processes

become mysteries to you. You become junk data, a biometric aberration. And at the very knife's edge of your self-identity, the extremes of your net-worth, you glimpse for a second a world in which all the relations are severed—you finally see all of us for what we are. That's what you can do.

RV: There's a passage you wrote, which I really love, that ends: 'with a a smile, I feel myself thinking as the iceberg approaches: "I want the ship to sink."' (it reminds me of a verse in the Gospels, where Jesus tells us, 'I HAVE COME TO SET THE WORLD ALIGHT, AND HOW I WISH IT WAS ALREADY BURNING!') - to me, this seems to be kind of the central component of what a 'pervert' means to you; someone who has given up on the taking part in the social life that is offered to them, and instead has cloistered themselves away to wait, lips quivering with anticipation, for the end of the world. But what comes after that collapse? There's such a strong anti-humanist element in NEKO GIRL that I find it hard to think you're imagining some new, better, fairer world order, like the way Marxists talk about life after the Revolution - what, if anything, is waiting for us?

NS: I have no illusions about collapse, though I've previously self-critiqued for my overemphasizing with pessimism, my overidentification with the same green stuff Nick Land was sippin' on. No-one honest about progress would ever tell a utopian lie. Historically, progress has always been for a few, the losers kiss the wheel. See how the web is stratified between those actors with the power to make any decision or change at all, and those who exist as mere anonymous transient data.

I think we're approaching a renewed dark age as everything human surrenders to the markets, even her interior. Reading histories, you'll find that humanity is ironically afflicted with powerful misanthropy. Almost every religion has a fantasy of the end days in which the majority will be punished: Kali Yuga, the Maitreya Buddha, the many Judgement Days. The greatest artists begin by indulging their inherent misanthropy. My single greatest artistic influence, Baudelaire, best formulated NEKO GIRL's maxim: "self-purification and anti-humanity." Kant spoke of "the crooked timber of humanity," of which "no straight thing can ever be made." The Romans fetishized achievement,

excellence and disdained the mediocrity of the hoi polloi... accordingly, the Nazis hated the impure in everything including themselves. Of today, we know the deal we've been offered: most in the world suffer so we the few here might indulge. Almost all of us happily accept the deal, and manage the pain of our hypocrisy through BDSM or ersatz-spirituality. Mass media openly flirts with the destruction of man, and the withdrawal from our neighbors & lovers into solitary, cooperative, social games of dubious reward happened with no resistance. To put it plainly: it seems like we've never really liked each other that much.

Well, maybe only in the dark will the stars give guidance again. Without light, the old world might finally disappear from our imagination. But that's just an immature fantasy.

RV: NEKO GIRL obviously has the catgirl at its core. What does she/they represent for you? It's true that the internet is fascinated with hybridity, but the catgirl is too perfect a synthesis to provide any meaningful critique of either cats or girls. Why did you choose her as a mascot of perversion? Is she the being that is born from all the thirst levied in the sterile direction of the screen - what happens when all the onanic energies of the internet agglomerate, assuming balloon-chested, feline shape?

The NEKO GIRL is a naturally depraved object. Her beastliness automatically places her beneath you, yet also imbues her with a secret power. In Japanese folklore, cats assume human shapes and fool the ever-foolish humans, sometimes even as prostitutes. She represents a willful ablation from humanity, 'perverted' by beastly qualities that only make her more desirable. She cannot be expected to understand human mores, taboos, permanently in heat and openly desiring—she's our modern day satyr. It appeals to the Japanese because it provides a non-human vector with which they might express all the civilization—destabilizing excess energy, that "accursed share," without damaging the polis. They could help us decommodify sexuality as it is used in industries of desire, dereify the puritanical rituals and rites of American sexuality that are its chief cultural export.

They could—but unfortunately they too only exist to be bought and sold. So we at NEKO GIRL of course advocate violent abolition of everyone in the third world, including our feline sisters in nature. Let the satyri run free again.

RV: In the interview you did that closes off the last issue of NEKO GIRL, when describing the magazine's intellectual ambitions, you use a lot of the words 'we' and 'us' - who are you referring to? Do you think of NEKO GIRL as engendering a kind of community? What would bond us/you?

NS: In my bluster, brought out by a terrible lack of self-preservation skills and a tyrannical ego, I'd hoped to somehow birth an anonymous collective. One of the things I sorely miss from the old Internet (gosh, I'm sounding like an old miser here) is the mutual understanding & expectation that we'd don our cloaks, and assume to our mutual delights a character. This was before performativity had a rate-of-return, before the vice squads emptied the RP halls of human filth. I am a great believer in double lives, in masks & fancy tricks. We are too fragile and cowardly to act natural in public, even the once-proud LGBT pervs succeeded in purging themselves of the queer queers in exchange for recognition by the State-supported father. I seek a bond with the anonymous, who in shedding their identities shun the social imaginary thrust upon them. I use 'we' and 'us' because I don't believe in individuality, I believe in the power of collective delusion, the mover of history. Men with enthusiasm would march their rifles into minefields, and die for their country. I've seen flagellants draw blood, make gushing wounds in honor of their Savior. They were moved to tears, and I understood that mere flesh & bone melts like butter before man's imagination. In the heat of such a sun, 'I' don't stand a chance.

With Thanks To...

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~ Mia & Aiden ~

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to anyone don't
tell them it
was me